THE HISTORY OF

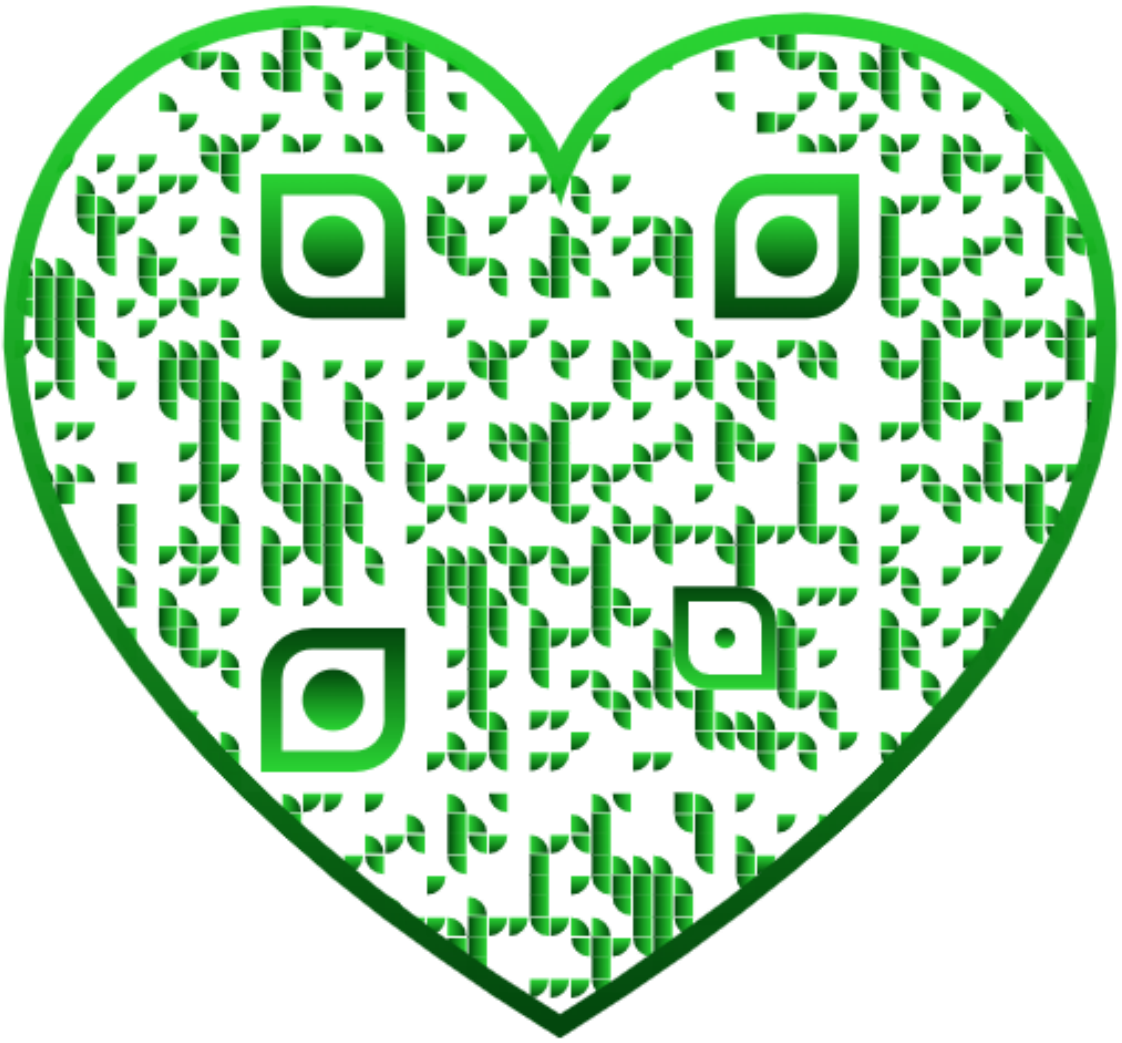
# ROCK

75p

109

## JAZZ, FUNK & SOUL

Aus $1.85 NZ $1.80 SA R1.85 US $1.85 IR 95p



# THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 10 Issue 109



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**Acknowledgements**

**CBS Records** 2161, 2162, 2164(T); **Jill Furmanovsky** 2169; **J. P. Leloir** 2166, 2170, 2175(B); **London Features International** 2163, 2167, 2169(Inset), 2171(T), 2172, 2173, 2174(Tr), 2175(T), 2176(T), Inside back cover(T, B), Back cover; **Tony Mottram** 2164(L); **David Redfern Photography** Front cover, 2164/2165, 2165(T), 2171(B), 2174(Tl); **Rex Features** 2179(B); **Vernon St. Hilaire** 2176(B); **Star File/Lydia Criss** 2168; **WEA/Solar Records** 2178, 2179(T, C), 2180; **Val Wilmer/Format Photography** 2177. Photo retouching by **Roy Flooks.** Discographies compiled by **Darren Crook.**



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The late Seventies saw the emergence of an exciting new band whose merger of new-wave energy and reggae rhythms brought them worldwide success. Yet despite their bleached, cropped hair and punky image, they comprised a guitarist in his mid thirties, a jazz-rock bassist and a drummer from unfashionable progressives Curved Air. The Police ushered in the era of rock's new professionals, when musicianship made a comeback after the punk revolution.


**The History of Rock** Price U.K. 75p I.R. 95p Aus. & N.Z. $1.85 S.A. R1.85 U.S.A. $1.85.

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***Back numbers*** **U.K. & Eire:** Back Nos. are obtainable from your newsagent or from **History of Rock** Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd., 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT at cover price. **Australia:** Back Nos. are obtainable from **The History of Rock** Back Nos., Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic 3001. **New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta:** Back Nos. are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.

***How to obtain binders for The History of Rock*** **U.K. and Eire:** Send a cheque/postal order for £3.70 per binder (incl. p. & p.), payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd, to: **The History of Rock** Binders, Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT. Please state the volume number(s) required. **Europe:** Write with remittance of £4.50 per binder (incl. p. & p.) to Orbis Publishing Ltd., England, address as above. **Australia:** For details of how to obtain your binders see inserts in early issues or write to **The History of Rock** Binders, First Post Pty Ltd, 23 Chandos Street, St Leonards, NSW 2065. The binders supplied are those illustrated in the magazine. **New Zealand:** Binders are available through your local newsagent or from **The History of Rock** Binders, Gordon and Gotch (NZ) Ltd, PO Box 1595, Wellington. **South Africa:** Binders are available through your local newsagent or through any branch of Central News Agency. In case of difficulty write to **The History of Rock** Binders, Intermag. PO Box 57394, Springfield 2137. **Malta:** Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.70. In case of difficulty write to **The History of Rock** Binders, Miller (Malta) Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

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# Soul Spectrum

## The Eighties soul scene – a dazzling kaleidoscope of colours, sounds and styles

THE HISTORY OF SOUL music over the years reveals a picture rich in both diversity and tradition. The Eighties brought several innovations in the field of black music – particularly with the growing popularity of electro-funk – but styles of old remained, as evidenced by the continuing importance of Motown.

Although the label had long since lost its standing as 'The Sound of Young America', it continued to exert an influence both inside and outside the soul field by virtue of its back catalogue, promoted vigorously by the company's publishing arm, Jobete Music, providing Eighties hits for Phil Collins, Leo Sayer and others, and heavily influencing white pop groups like Culture Club.

### Scratching the surface

Jazz-funk, an offshoot of disco in which the virtuosity of the performers was often as prized as their image and material, came to popularity in the late-Seventies UK club scene. Meanwhile, in America, ideas first apparent in Seventies Eurodisco came to their logical conclusion in the field of electro-funk. Synthesisers squealed, rhythm boxes pounded the beat and melody was at a premium – this was almost a form of soul-less soul for the dance floor.

Non-musicians began to get in on the act, making music through 'scratching', the DJ-inspired craze of rhythmically manipulating discs on the turntable, and 'rapping', the talk-over technique borrowed from reggae toasters that threatened to become the Eighties equivalent of doowop. If the spotlight had shifted from the concert stage to the disco in the Seventies, the spontaneity of these innovations made the disco console the Eighties soul stage.

*The success of Michael Jackson (below) with his* Thriller *album of 1982 seemed likely to prove a hard act for others to follow. The record provided a clutch of transatlantic hit singles, while Jackson reversed the trend towards faceless, mechanistic dance-floor funk by backing each single release with an inventive promotional video.*

In commercial terms, the success story of the early Eighties was that of former Motown artist Michael Jackson. He followed up *Off The Wall*, his disco-oriented chart-topper of 1979, with the blockbusting *Thriller* (1982), which sold over 10 million copies worldwide and provided innumerable hit singles. The record merged elements of Motown soul, disco and even heavy rock; guitarist Eddie Van Halen's lead break in 'Beat It' single-handedly started a craze for a rock-soul synthesis.

Yet despite the growing claims of technology and the eclipse of the soul vocal stylist, there were still familiar sounds to be heard. The swooping string arrangements of the late lamented Philadelphia International label lived on in the work of the Chic Organization, while the Earth Wind and Fire horn section added spice to numerous releases in a manner reminiscent of the Memphis Horns some 15 years previously. It could safely be assumed that soul music in the Eighties would continue to draw inspiration from a wide variety of sources and recycle them into many familiar – yet intriguingly different – forms as the decade progressed.

MICHAEL HEATLEY

# EARTH WIND & FIRE

## A band with all the elements of success

EARTH WIND AND FIRE were essentially the creation of Maurice White, an unlikely visionary born in Memphis, Tennessee, on 19 December 1944. At the age of six, he was already singing with a gospel quartet at Rose Hill Baptist Church. By the age of 12, he had decided to concentrate on drumming and accordingly threw himself into numerous school talent shows, at which fellow strivers included Booker T. Jones, Isaac Hayes and David Porter.

These halcyon days in Memphis ended in 1960 when he was taken from under the wing of an indulgent grandmother and spirited off to join his parents in Chicago. Father had qualified as a physician and Maurice, it was deemed, should follow his example. He dutifully enrolled at Roosevelt University but soon switched to the Chicago Music Conservatory. By 1963 he was working four nights a week at the Hungry I Club and doing session work for Chess Records during the daytime. At Chess he learned the niceties of drumming along with discipline, teamwork, commercial sense, composing and production skills and played behind an incredible array of artists including Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Buddy Guy, Koko Taylor, Etta James, Fontella Bass, Billy Stewart, Sonny Stitt and Ramsey Lewis, who asked White to join his trio.

### Elemental energy

Lewis was a no-nonsense piano player with the sounds of the church in his bones and a sharp ear for the kind of funk the customers wanted. Maurice, together with bassist Cleveland Eaton, replaced Red Holt and Eldee Young in the Ramsey Lewis Trio where they stayed from 1965 to 1970, laying down 10 albums and scoring pop hits with 'Wade In The Water' (1966) and others. When Maurice quit it was to

form the Salty Peppers (together with Don Barry, Louis Satterfield and Don Whitehead) who enjoyed some success in Chicago, where they played the clubs and lent their talents to TV commercials.

Later in 1970, the Salty Peppers folded and White began to formulate Earth Wind and Fire, a name that hinted at his interest in astrology. The group's original line-up consisted of Maurice, his brother Verdine (bass), Michael Beale (guitar, harmonica), Wade Flemmons (vocals), Yackov Ben Israel (percussion, congas), Sherry Scott (vocals), Alex Thomas (trombone), Chet Washington (tenor sax) and Don Whitehead (keyboards). The band signed to Warner Brothers and began to record in Los Angeles.

From the outset, Earth Wind and Fire were not a traditional soul band. Apart from a tenuous connection with jazz, courtesy of Maurice, their antecedents were in the good-time traditions of R&B. The white feedback into black music had resulted in the fusion music of outfits like the Chambers Brothers, Fifth Dimension, Santana, Chicago, Tower of Power, Graham Central Station, the Ohio Players, Rare Earth and LaBelle, modified over the decade by a kaleidoscope of contributions from Miles Davis, Weather Report, Milton Nascimento and Stevie Wonder. It was here, amid memories of 'flower power' and Aquarian dreams, that the roots of Earth Wind and Fire lay.

### Fan the Fire

*Earth Wind And Fire*, their first LP, was produced by Joe Wissert and emerged in 1971. Most of the songs were written by Maurice White, Flemmons and Whitehead and ranged through hard funk, apocalyptic gospel, latin and jazz to mainstream R&B. 'Fan The Fire', a single released in April, had served as a taster for the album, but more indicative of things to come was 'Love Is Life', released with the album, which coupled R&B with mystical pronouncements on the nature of the universe.

Their second LP – *The Need Of Love*, issued in December 1971 – was undeniably potent and more than a trifle odd. Sub-Hendrix rock, lyrical love ballads and greasy R&B filled side one, while the schizophrenic nature of the band was signalled on side two by an extended jam called 'Energy'. Beginning with a murderous assault on the drum kit, it flirted with the memory of John Coltrane before devolving into doggerel on the mystery of existence.

Hardly surprisingly, these first two albums failed to ignite public interest; in an era of classic soul, when every other artist seemed torn from the bosom of the church, down on one knee sweating and testifying, Earth Wind and Fire seemed dangerously cerebral. Indeed in some quarters they were even construed as dangerously white – campus clowns with jazz affiliations and no campus!

The group now left Warners, recorded a one-off soundtrack album for Stax and

*Opposite: The massed horns, percussion section and instrumentalists of Earth Wind and Fire. Above: Maurice White selects some EW&F favourites on the juke-box.*

signed a new deal with Columbia. The first album for the new label, *Last Days And Time*, released in January 1972, saw a new line up: Maurice and Verdine were joined by Philip Bailey (vocals, congas, percussion), Larry Dunn (keyboards, clarinet), Ralph Johnson (drums, percussion), Ronnie Laws (reeds), Roland Bautista (guitar) and Jessica Cleaves (vocals). Production remained in the hands of Joe Wissert both for this set and its June 1973 follow-up, *Head To The Sky*, on which Bautista and Laws were replaced by Al McKay and Andrew Woodfolk respectively, while an extra member was recruited in guitarist Johnny Graham.

The cover artwork of *Head To The Sky* mirrored White's spiritual pretensions: Jessica, in white turban and sexy kaftan, was surrounded by bare-chested males in the last stages of lotus-posture boredom as flowers exploded outward and a bearded Maurice presided benignly over proceedings. The album's lyrics were equally embarrassing but the music itself was superb, a winning blend of Forties scat, Chicano shuffle, West Coast whimsy and unbrindled exotica, densely percussive and layered in construction.

All the faults and virtures that made Earth Wind and Fire such maddening, intoxicating entertainers were well established by the time they unveiled *Open Our Eyes* in April 1974. The album track 'Kalimba Story' was the White brothers' declaration of intent to make 'future music' and the track 'Mighty Mighty', which was released as a single and made Number 29 in the US charts, proved a success. In October, 'Devotion' gave the group another hit and mass acceptance seemed to be just around the corner. It came with a soundtrack album, *That's The Way Of The World*, in March: polished, tight harmonies, alto voices led by Bailey congregating over busy rhythms and thrusting brass – all characterised this set and carried the single 'Shining Star' to Number 1 in the same month.

On the next album, *Gratitude* (1975), the group's drum sound was boosted by the addition of Fred White while another newcomer, Don Myrick, contributed eloquent sax. The LP marked time with useful live renditions of their best-known numbers and provided a souvenir of the band's staggering stage show, which featured, among many treats, lasers, levitating drummers and vanishing acts.

### Spirits in wonderland

The following year, Maurice White and arranger/producer Charles Stepney, whom White had first met back in his Chess days, produced another studio album. Dedicated to Stepney, who died during the sessions, *Spirit* represented a further polishing of that supreme style – all sound and fury, perhaps signifying nothing – that defined the group. The title track served up the usual sentimental nonsense – 'everytime you smile, you bless a child' – but generally the album felt fine and 'Saturday Nite', with its blazing horn riff, provided another US hit single at Number 21.

In December 1977, *All'n'All* was released; the new LP revealed Maurice White up to his neck in ill-conceived metaphysics – but behind the obsession with Egyptology, pyramid power and arcane matters dear to Californians surged a remarkable sound. Judged on these grounds, as pure sound only, 'Serpentine Fire' and 'Fantasy' were brilliantly executed pieces and kept the group in the singles charts. *The Best Of Earth Wind And Fire Volume 1*, released in December 1978, supplied only three new songs but the choppily percussive 'Love Music', an irresistible 'September' and a blistering big-band version of Lennon-McCartney's 'Got To Get You Into My Life', recorded for the *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* film of 1978, fully confirmed the group's supremacy.

The Earth Wind and Fire production line rolled on with *I Am* in June 1979, and although critical plaudits were restrained it still yielded two sizeable hits. The first, 'Boogie Wonderland', featured female vocal group the Emotions in full cry and was aimed unashamedly at the nation's feet, while the second – 'After The Love Has Gone' – was a devastating ballad, gently gilded by Don Myrick's smooth tenor sax and equal to anything ventured by the newly-romantic Commodores. These followed 'September' and 'Life' into the US Top Ten, while marking the group's greatest level of success in the UK, where they notched up three Top Five singles in just over half a year. New writers like Brenda Russell were employed for the next LP, an adventurous double set entitled *Faces* (1980), but despite superb singles in 'Let Me Talk', 'Pride' and 'Faces', sales were disappointing.

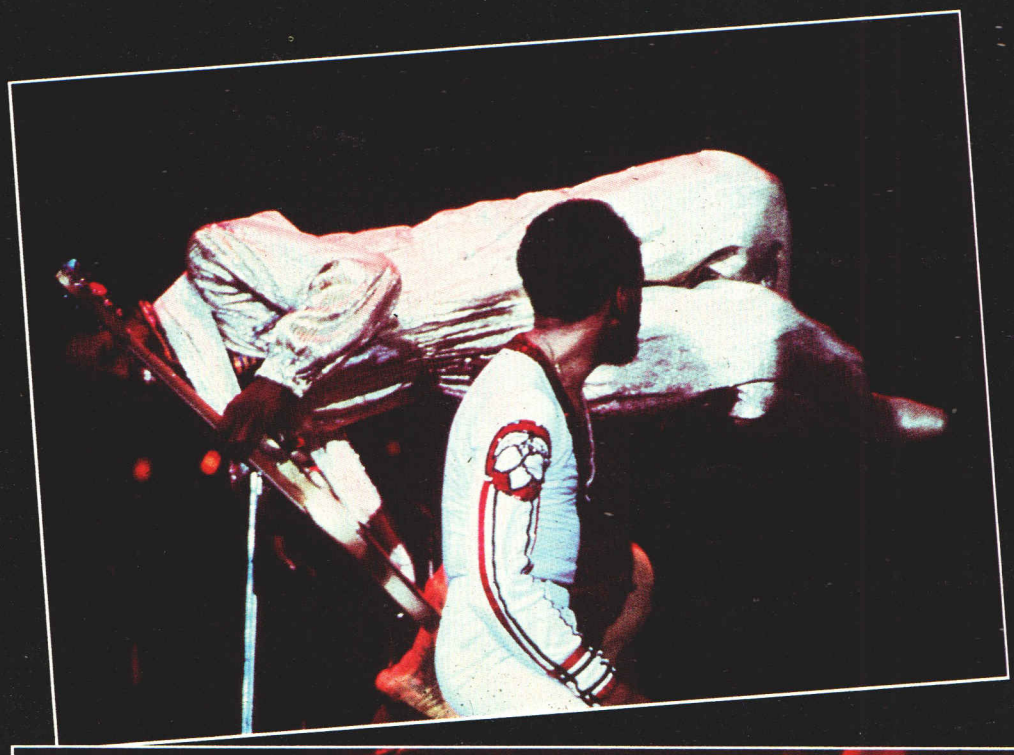
The streamlined *Raise* fared better on release in November 1981. Eschewing mysticism and again favouring outside writers, it had a sharpness appropriate to the time. The bright-eyed 'Let's Groove' made Number 3 in the US as a single,

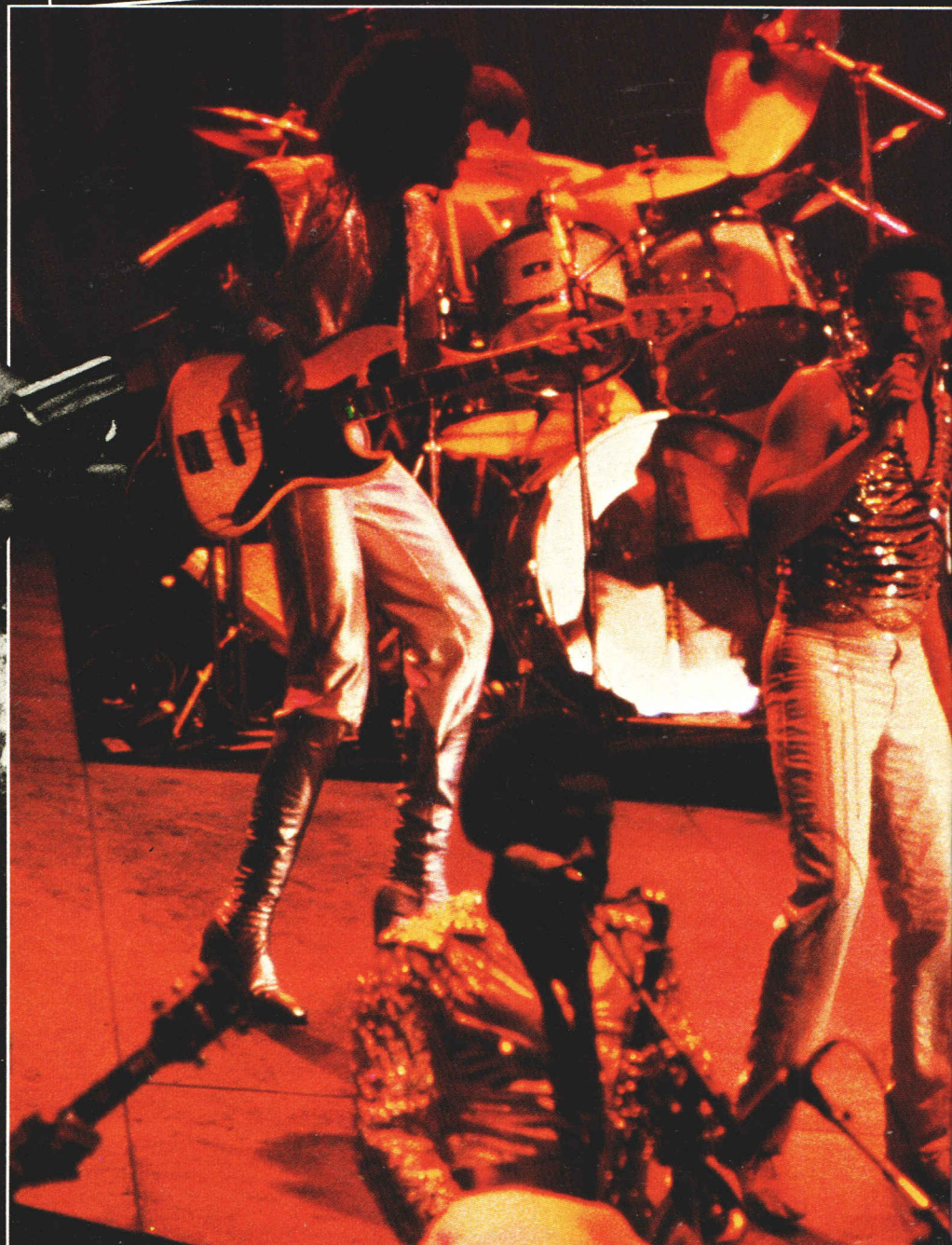
while those who graduated to the album were rewarded with slinky delights like 'My Love'.

**Back to earth**

The group appeared to be on an even keel once more, although their huge, racially mixed audiences in America and the UK were now being seduced by the snappy sounds of Shalamar and other stylish funk outfits, while various members of Earth Wind and Fire were increasingly sidetracked into production and session work.

Maurice had long been successfully involved with Ramsey Lewis, Deniece Williams and the Emotions, and by 1983 had turned his attention to Jennifer Holiday. Having flexed his muscles with Pockets, Verdine finally settled for producing Britain's Level 42 with the assistance of Larry Dunn. The latter had completed





*Maurice White, undisputed leader of Earth Wind and Fire, plays his kalimba (below) and fronts his all-singing, all-dancing band on stage (far right and below right) as brother Verdine levitates (right).*

projects with Stanley Turrentine, Caldera and Lenny White, while Al McKay swung into action with Ren Woods, the Mighty Clouds of Joy and Finis Henderson. In August 1983, under the aegis of George Duke, lead singer Philip Bailey stepped out with his own album *Continuation*.

Despite all this activity, Earth Wind and Fire did manage to issue an album in 1983. On *Powerlight*, the group employed Trinidadian steel band virtuoso Robert Greenidge, of Taj Mahal fame, but despite his contribution to fine singles in 'Side By Side' and 'Spread Your Love' critical response was muted. After 15 US Top Forty hits and a number of best-selling albums, Earth Wind and Fire seemed to be losing their powers. CLIVE ANDERSON

**Earth Wind and Fire**
**Recommended Listening**

*The Best Of Earth Wind And Fire Vol 1* (CBS 83284) (Includes: Fantasy, Shining Star, Got To Get You Into My Life, September, Reasons, Singasong); *I Am* (CBS 86084) (Includes: Boogie Wonderland, Let Your Feelings Show, In The Stone, Can't Let Go, You And I, Star).

# BREEZIN'

## The cool night airs of George Benson

IN THE HERE-TODAY, gone-tomorrow world of rock music, George Benson is a scarce commodity indeed: a technically brilliant master of his instrument, a fine vocalist and a giant of two very different spheres of music – modern jazz and soul/disco.

It is this last quality above all that sets George Benson apart from his other gifted contemporaries. Virtually single-handedly, and in less than half-a-dozen albums, he crossed the once incompatible boundaries of mainstream instrumental jazz and classy pop, introducing audiences to a new brand of music in the process.

Benson was born in the mid Forties (his exact birthdate seems to be a well-kept secret) into a strictly religious, poor family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His stepfather, a keen admirer of jazz guitarist Charlie Christian, made George his first makeshift guitar from empty cigar boxes and, at the age of four, George entered and won a local amateur singing contest. After graduating to ukelele and, at the age of eight, getting his first real acoustic guitar, Master Benson spent leisurely evenings and weekends supplementing his pocket money by busking. Two years later, he was spotted by a talent scout from RCA and

signed to their X label, a black subsidiary, for which he later cut a couple of instrumental singles.

Heavily influenced by virtuoso guitarist Wes Montgomery, later a close friend and mentor, the teenage Benson took up the electric guitar, serving his apprenticeship in local jazz clubs. His other notable influences included Hank Garland, Grant Green and his stepfather's favourite, Charlie Christian. At the age of 18, Benson first heard the music of saxophonist Charlie Parker and his love for jazz became all-consuming.

**Meet the new boss**

He joined Brother Jack McDuff's Organ Trio in the early Sixties, gaining valuable experience from the group's almost constant schedule of one-nighters across the United States; then in 1964, after recording an album with McDuff for the Prestige label entitled *New Boss Guitar Of George Benson With The Brother Jack McDuff Quartet*, Benson left to form his own jazz-oriented group. A succession of jazz albums for different labels followed, two each on Columbia and Verve and three for A&M, before Benson settled in under experienced producer Creed Taylor at CTI in 1971. A good example of Benson's Sixties work is *The Other Side Of Abbey Road* (1969), an interesting, but largely uninspired reworking of the Beatles' album.

Over the next five years at CTI, Benson fulfilled his considerable promise as a guitarist, recording six albums – notably *White Rabbit* (1972) and *Bad Benson* (1974) – and building a strong and respected following in jazz circles. At the same time, however, he was becoming aware of jazz music's biggest problems: it had little commercial appeal and catered mainly to a sophisticated cult audience. A 1975 single, 'Supership', made Number 30 in the UK, but Benson remained largely unknown to mass audiences.

This state of affairs changed dramatically the following year when Benson left CTI and joined Warner Brothers. There, under the wing of Bob Krasnow, he was teamed with ace producer Tommy LiPuma and recorded the album *Breezin'* (1976). Although five of the six cuts were instrumentals, LiPuma gave Benson the freedom to show off his unique vocal style on a smoochy half-jazz, half-soul version of Leon Russell's 'This Masquerade', written in 1972. Benson had occasionally sung on record before, but his vocals had nearly always featured well down in the mix. On 'This Masquerade' LiPuma brought out Benson's rich, baritone voice to act as a silky smooth counterpoint to the track's expertly woven guitar passages.

Released as a single, 'This Masquerade' made Number 10 on the *Billboard* Hot Hundred and became the first record to top both the US jazz and soul charts simultaneously. *Breezin'* went platinum and later became the biggest-selling jazz album of all time, garnering Benson countless awards that included three Grammys.

*Opposite: George Benson – the acceptable face of soul? Above: The guitarist finds a vocal partner in Aretha Franklin.*

Having finally found the magic hit formula Benson, again with LiPuma at the helm, recorded *In Flight* (1977), a million-selling follow-up which, now aimed at a different audience, comprised four vocal tracks and only two instrumentals. Without doubt the album's highlight was an exquisitely sung version of 'Nature Boy', Nat 'King' Cole's 1948 hit written by eden ahbez, a Brooklyn-born yogi who believed that only divinities were worthy of capital initials for their names.

**Into orbit**

The success of *In Flight* brought Benson superstar status, with world tours, guest appearances on recordings by artists ranging from Herbie Hancock to Minnie Riperton, innumerable awards (including several more Grammys), an invitation to record the soundtrack for the Muhammad Ali movie *The Greatest* (1977), wardrobe credits on his album sleeves, and lilting duets – on which the voracious US record industry seems to thrive – with Aretha Franklin, Chaka Khan and Patti Austin. Superstardom for Benson also meant the opportunity to fulfil every guitarist's dream: to be given a free hand to design his own guitars, custom-made for him by Ibanez. His small-bodied, semi-acoustic GB10 became a familiar Benson trademark.

After *In Flight* and, in particular, the brilliant double album, *Livin' Inside Your Love* (1979), Benson's recordings leaned increasingly toward pop/soul to the almost total exclusion of jazz; it could be argued that he had once again become stuck in an artistic rut just as he was in his pre-*Breezin'* days – albeit this time a highly profitable and commercially successful one. Most of the numbers George Benson recorded were well-chosen standards or specially-commissioned material.

In 1980 Quincy Jones, fresh from his staggering success with Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* (1979), produced the biggest-selling Benson album to date, the late-night listening, disco-inspired *Give Me The Night*, which yielded two smash hit singles in the title track and 'Love X Love'. The 1981 Benson anthology *The George Benson Collection* featured, in best record industry tradition, two all-new compositions, 'Turn Your Love Around' and 'Never Give Up On A Good Thing', both very danceable and both produced by Jay Graydon. Benson's 1983 offering, *In Your Eyes*, was produced by Turkish-born Arif Mardin, formerly the Atlantic label's disco mastermind, with a little help from Kashif.

Benson's popularity with the Eighties record-buying public is undoubted, and he has also exerted a considerable influence on new musicians. UK band Central Line, for example, scored a hit in early 1983 with 'Nature Boy' inspired, they openly admit, purely by Benson's 1977 version. In fact it is debatable whether they had even heard the original recording. Benson's success in crossing over from mainstream jazz to mainstream pop also opened the doors for a new wave of jazz-funk musicians, typified by such artists as Grover Washington Jr in the US and Iceland's Mezzoforte.

Benson's superb, instinctive jazz feel reflected not only in his inimitable guitar work but also, since 1976, in his soulful vocals, sets him apart from other black singers, disco exponents and jazz masters and will ensure him a lasting place in the history of rock.

MARK LEWISOHN

**George Benson**
**Recommended Listening**

*The George Benson Collectton* (Atlantic K 66107) (Includes: Turn Your Love Around, Love All The Hurt Away, Give Me The Night, Cast Your Fate To The Wind, Never Give Up On A Good Thing, On Broadway).

# CYBERNETIC SOUL

## Was this the final frontier of dance music?

THE STORY OF black music in the early Eighties can be told through three related images: the street, the studio and outer space. These images have rebounded around the galaxy of popular music, creating new styles of dance, new attitudes to musical production and a new generation of performers. Slumped against a decaying wall in the South Bronx is the solid frame of Afrika Bambaataa; beside him on a square of cardboard a B. Boy shudders stiffly like a robot coming to life, and the perfect beat of an Arthur Baker mega-mix escapes from the high-tech chrome of a portable stereo cabinet.

Bambaataa embodies the new era. Leader of one-time street gang the Black Spades, since magically transformed into a cultural army called the Zulu Nation, he has the respect of break dancers, rappers and graffiti artists throughout the universe of hip-hop style. At the turntables of New York's Roxy Club, where the floor erupts with electro body dancers, or in the studios of the independent Tommy Boy label, where he guides the techno tracks of his group, the Soul Sonic Force, Afrika Bambaataa patrols the planets of a new musical style.

The hard dance beat of Black American funk meets the synthetic sound of European pop, as bodies pop and B. Girls freeze-frame across the floor. A rough mix of Spyder D's 'Smerphies Dance' raps and crackles through gigantic speakers as an electric current shoots through the night. This is music moving to the next phase – new technology and versions of a future galaxy stolen by the street crews in their search for the sharpest dance style. Human bodies, moving like androids, crank to the beat of black music in orbit. The Eighties is the dawning of a new dance stance: the era of 'cybernetic soul'.

### Sidewalk invaders

Friday night at Manhattan's Funhouse in the early Eighties was a ritual celebration of cybernetic soul. Dance crews from the boroughs converged on the club, bearing their allegiances on shortened T-shirts – 'East Side Electric Force', 'The Sidewalk Invaders', 'Shock Squad'. The music they carried with them in portable blasters and in the data banks of their new-world minds blended all categories of pop. The punk-funk of Prince's '1999' dressed funk in the aggressive style of European new wave, the funk'n'roll of Rick James' 'Cold Blooded' added rock licks to the hard edges of urban soul, while the white synth-pop of Britain's Thomas Dolby and the Human

League also found space in the Funhouse. A gigantic clown's head housed the DJ's console – inside was one of the city's sharpest pulses, John 'Jellybean' Benitez, master of a million remixes.

Benitez was just one of a new generation of producers of which Arthur Baker and John Robie, who mixed hits for Rockers' Revenge, Planet Patrol and New Order, were the best known, followed by Raul Rodriguez, one-time DJ at New York New York, who produced two Funhouse anthems: Man Parrish's 'Hip Hop Be Bop (Don't Stop)' and Two Sisters' 'High Noon'. Those extended 12-inch dance tracks, waxed in the heat of the disco inferno, once threatened to diminish the role of the DJ, but actually achieved the opposite.

Larry Levan, DJ at Manhattan's Paradise Garage, made the meteoric journey from programmer to producer and finally to performer as a member of the New York City Peech Boys, whose 'Don't Make Me Wait' was a devastating example of the new sound. Mixing was the discipline of cybernetic soul; each new production brought with it a battery of possibilities: the club mix, the dub mix, the acappella version, the atomic shot, the mega-mix and of course the scratch mix. In the words that were immortalised by the soothing DJ of Indeep's 'Last Night A DJ Saved My Life', the mix actually had the power to heal: 'There's not a problem that I can't fix/I can do it in the mix.'

### Digital dancing

Cybernetic soul did not emerge out of the clubs alone; it developed alongside a new group of independent labels, including Tommy Boy, Streetwise and Profile, and seized the power of new technology. The Sony Walkman personal stereo introduced the term 'wired for soul', while the portable stereo, known variously as a 'ghetto blaster', 'vox box' or 'Third World briefcase', turned urban streets, subways and the parks into dub clubs. Inside the recording studios themselves, new digital facilities, new computer banks and advanced synthesisers gave rise to a high-tech musical culture. The term 'electro-funk' controversially edged its way into the history of black music.

George Clinton, a musical innovator with Parliament, Funkadelic and others, was at the forefront of the major developments in the universe of cybernetic soul. His album *Computer Games* (1983), a bizarre journey into the infotech world of computers, synth drums, tape loops, vocoders and Lyricon synthesisers, seemed likely to become one of the classic albums of the early Eighties while the single, 'Loopzilla', saw a tape loop of just eight seconds of recorded music sculptured into a monumental dance-track that included snatches from 15 years of music. Old Motown met new funk in a cybernetic style as the microchip, the machine and the human mind created the music for digital dancers to move to.

In the summer of 1983, the Washington-based independent label DETT released a cybernetic club mix called 'Search And Destroy', which merged the hard-edged percussion of funk with a barrage of space-age effects drawn from computer technology and science fiction. The name of the record was taken from a video game, and the name of the group – Arcade Funk – was an open admission that computer games and space invader machines were shaping the expectations of a new generation of record buyers.

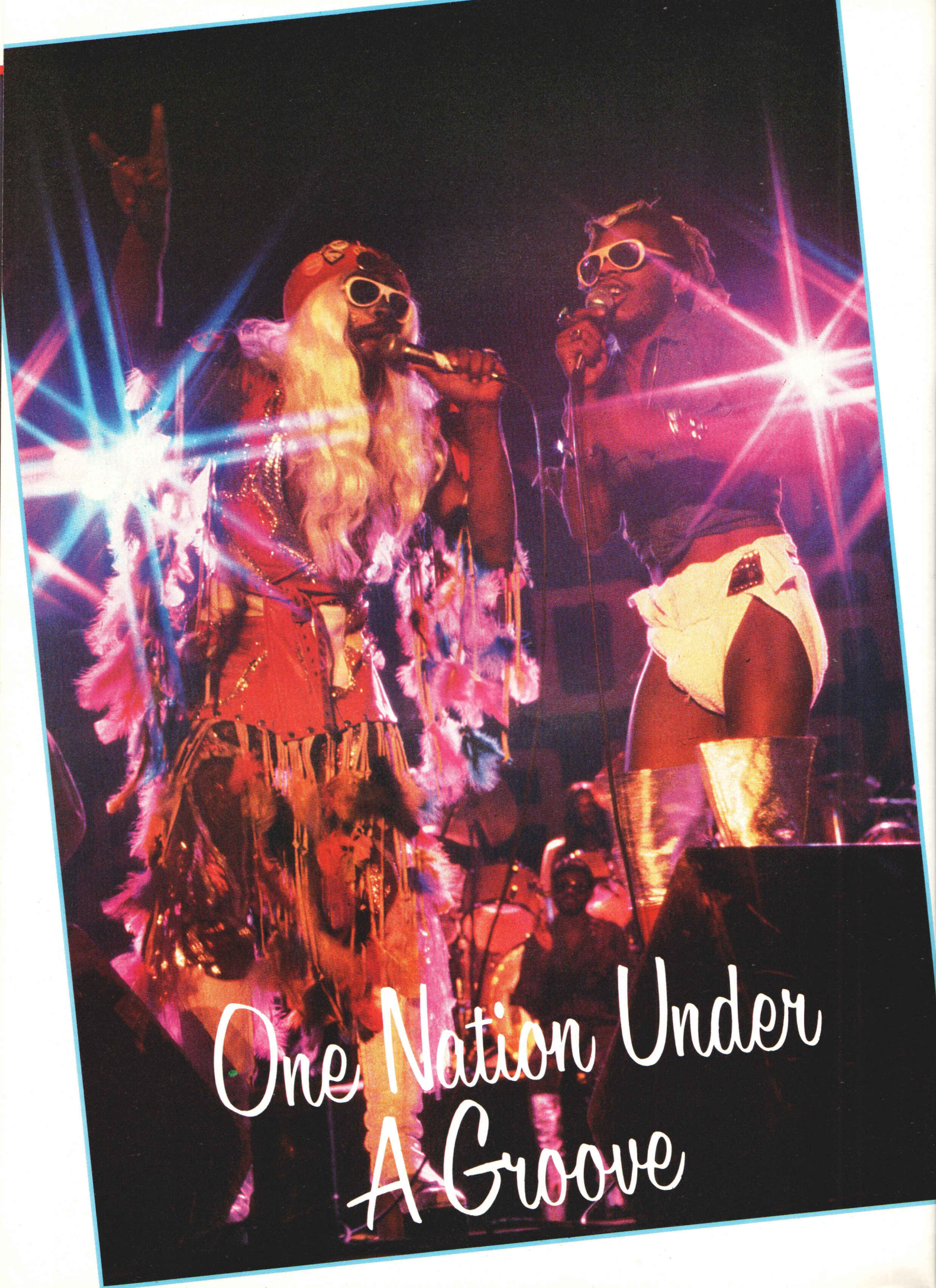
*Opposite: Afrika Bambaataa leads the Soul Sonic Force. Inset above: Rock meets soul in the music of Rick James. Above: Electro body dancing at the Roxy Club, New York.*

### Space: the final frontier

The robotic rhythm of electrofunk was produced by deliberately anonymous groups, often consisting of studio producers, whose names read like a litany of extra-terrestrial culture. New names appeared almost every week – the Packman, Cybotron, G. Force, Orbit – and even the pages of *Billboard* had to take account of the electro revolution.

New music invariably challenges established attitudes, and electro-funk caused more controversy than any other development in black music with its heavy emphasis on synthesised instrumentals which tended to push vocals to the periphery. Electrofunk became the style of the B. Boys but the enemy of R&B purists. For some people, it simply had no relationship to soul and no place in the history of black music – but for others it was a form of new romantic pop with a gloss of funk and seemed to point to a rich future.

The term cybernetic soul means something more than electro-funk: it implies a meeting of humans and machines and the coming together of tradition and innovation. The voice of soul enriches the tempo set by the new machines. In 1982 a Boston group once known as the Energetics were transformed by Tommy Boy records from a vocal quintet into a unit known as Planet Patrol. The line that runs from the Dramatics to *Star Wars'* Darth Vader had been drawn. Cybernetic soul: where the robots meet their roots. STUART COSGROVE


One Nation Under
A Groove

# Flying the funk flag with George Clinton

GEORGE CLINTON is soul music's most irrepressible fantasy. Dressed in a flamboyant wig, silver high-heeled boots, a pair of red nylon tights and a cape that shimmers with the excessive glitter of high camp, he inhabits an eccentric universe. Starships from outer space, strip-cartoon characters, monsters and Martians are thrown together into a bizarre science-fiction comedy. This is black music in the world of parody. Batman and Robin, the Lone Ranger and Tonto and the fearless exploits of Flash Gordon are forgotten when Clinton and his assistant William 'Bootsy' Collins cruise the galaxies to recycle funk through fantasy and fiction.

**Standing for Parliament**

Born in Blainfield, Ohio, Clinton became lead singer with doowop group the Parliaments during the Fifties and recorded a couple of singles – 'Poor Willie' (for ABC in 1956) and 'Lonely Island' (for New Records in 1958) – before signing to Motown. None of the Parliaments' recordings for this label were ever released, however, and it was not until 1967 when the group cut a single for Revilot Records, that they first tasted success. '(I Wanna) Testify' reached Number 20 in the US charts and 'All Your Goodies Are Gone' gave them another, albeit minor, hit later the same year.

Clinton was also employed by Revilot as a staff songwriter and was responsible for numerous dance tracks, including Darrell Banks' go-go classic 'Our Love (Is In The Pocket)'. Somewhere along the way the Parliaments lost their mohair suits and the last letter of their name and were transformed into Parliament, the first family of eccentric funk. Disillusioned with the restrictiveness of mainstream soul and the tiresome way in which vocal groups had institutionalised a slick uniform of matching shirts and formation dancing, Clinton broke loose. The Seventies became his decade of new extravagance – the period of P. Funk.

Parliament became the meeting-place for two powerful traditions in the field of soul. Clinton introduced the vocal harmonies of his own past and strengthened the fabric of his new sound with musicians drawn from the JBs, those hard-edged rhythm masters who had been the backbone of James Brown's pioneering street funk. Parliament had the baddest and the best: the brass constructions of Fred Wesley, the piercing saxophone of Maceo Parker and the basslines of Bootsy

*Opposite: Parliament broke free of all restriction to create their own wild funk style. Top right: On stage with a cast of thousands. Right: George Clinton, Parliament's inimitable lead singer.*

*Above: The boy with stars in his eyes – Bootsy Collins, whose thumping bass lines powered Parliament and several other Seventies funk outfits.*

Collins. Whereas Parliament's music was an attempt to bring together two different forms of urban soul, George Clinton's other group, Funkadelic (which often featured the same personnel), was an experiment in bringing together two diverse musical traditions.

### Dance or die

The name Funkadelic implies a meeting of mighty opposites, an experiment in funk and psychedelia. Along with Sly Stone, Jimi Hendrix and the Oakland-based band War, Clinton tried to find a sound that combined the 'dance or die' principles of black American funk with the expanded consciousness of white rock. Funkadelic's surreal dance music was summed up by one of Clinton's appropriately outrageous album titles: *Free Your Mind And Your Ass Will Follow* (1971). Initially, Funkadelic was an outlet for Clinton's excursions into the world of hard rock and metal music, while Parliament concentrated on experimentation within black musical traditions, but as the Seventies developed the patterns became increasingly confused. Over the years, the Parliament/Funkadelic aggregation was to spawn countless other groups and identities including Bootsy's Rubber Band, the Brides of Funkenstein, Parlet, the Horny Horns, Zapp and the K.9 Corp.

The major contribution that Clinton has made to the history of black music can be traced in his influence rather than in hit records. Although most critics see the international success of Funkadelic's 'One Nation Under A Groove – Part 1', which reached Number 28 in the US charts and Number 9 in the UK in 1978, as Clinton's greatest moment, his music has paved the way for a number of massively important developments. The collusion of punk and funk in recordings like Prince's 'Ronnie Talk To Russia', the funk'n'roll style of Rick James and Nona Hendryx's transformation from LaBelle to B.Girl could not have happened without George Clinton's pioneering work.

### Down-to-earth

In 1975, Casablanca Records released Clinton's definitive album, Parliament's *Mothership Connection*, which was a space-age fantasy steeped in the new style of cybernetic soul. The album told the story of an extra-terrestrial invasion in which strange beings invade the earth bringing with them the music of the mothership: 'Good Evening. Do not attempt to adjust your radio. We have taken control to bring you this special show. We will return it to you as soon as you are groovy. Welcome to Station WEFUNK, better known as WeFunk or deeper still the Mothership Connection, home of the extra-terrestrial brothers, dealers of funky music: P.Funk, uncut funk, the bomb . . .'

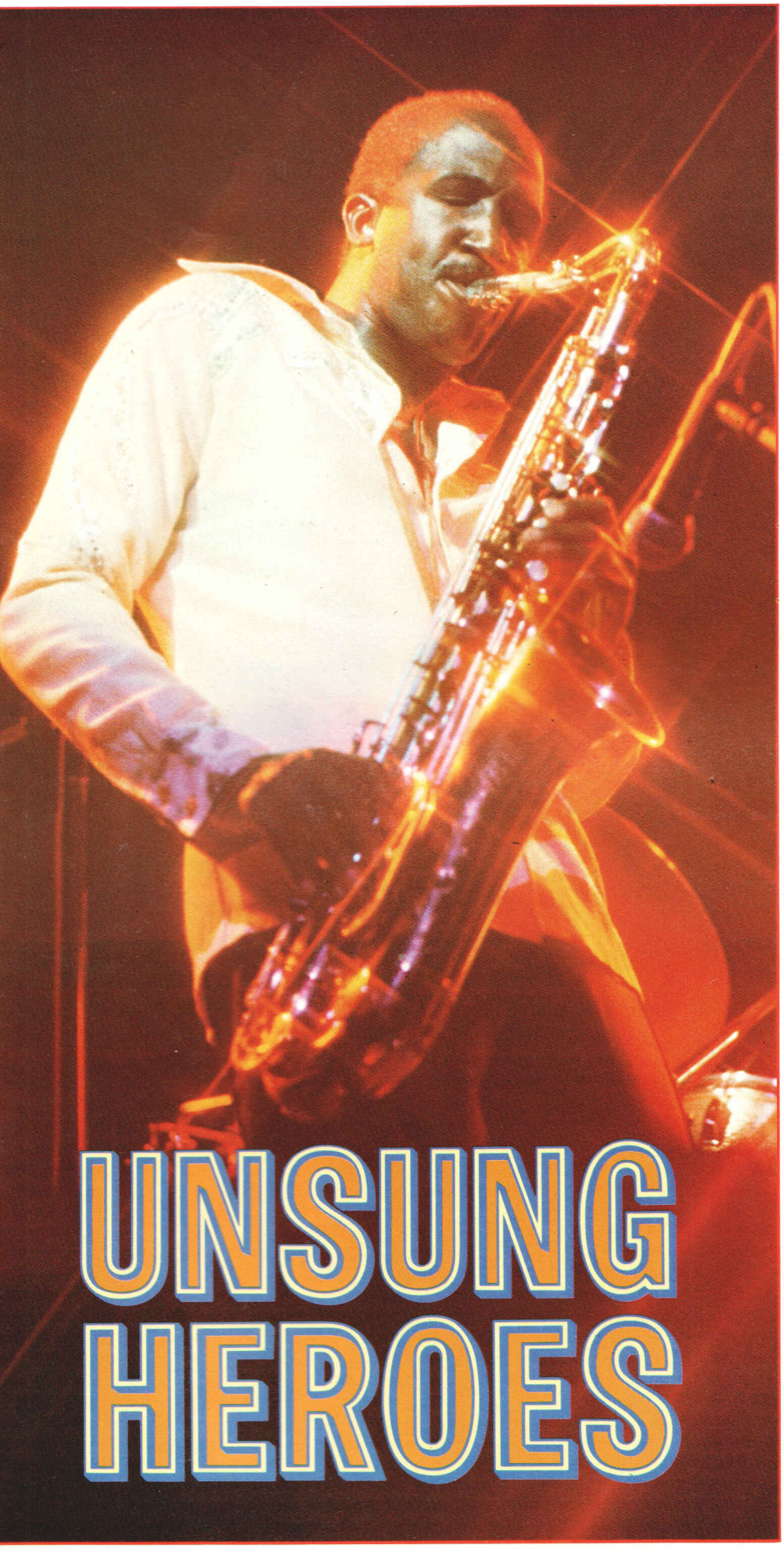
'Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker)', a mid-Seventies celebration of dance, excess and the shock of the new, was lifted from the LP to reach Number 15 in the US singles charts. Along with Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* (1971) and Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* (1972), *Mothership Connection* deserves its reputation as one of the most influential albums to come out of America in the Seventies.

In 1983, when George Clinton arrived in Britain to promote *Computer Games*, his first ever solo album after more than 20 years of recording, he brought with him a timely reminder of the style and wit of ghetto eccentricity. He appeared on television to present a live version of his funk single 'Loopzilla', and visibly shocked an audience weaned on new wave, new romantics and new technology by drawing on his greatest gift – the art of flamboyance. Like Cab Calloway, Little Richard and Rufus Thomas before him, George Clinton turned his eccentricity into a public spectacle and, with his endless cast of characters, earned a reputation as black music's chameleon. STUART COSGROVE

**George Clinton/Parliament Recommended Listening**

**George Clinton**
*Computer Games* (Capitol EST 12246) (Includes: Get Dressed, Man's Best Friend, Loopzilla, Pot Sharing Tots, Atomic Dog, One Fun At A Time).

**Parliament**
*Mothership Connection* (Casablanca CBC 4009) (Includes: P. Funk (Wants To Get Funked Up), Mothership Connection (Star Child), Unfunky UFO, Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker), Handcuffs).




## The Crusaders: champions of jazz, funk and soul

ALTHOUGH MAJOR SUCCESS, in the shape of 1979's *Street Life* album and single, was a long time coming for the Crusaders, its eventual arrival was extremely well deserved. Throughout their long and distinguished performing and recording career, the Crusaders have constantly set musical standards for other groups to follow; as a result they are widely acknowledged as supreme professionals of jazz and rock.

**The west is the best**

Four schoolfriends from Houston, Texas – Wilton Felder (tenor sax), Joe Sample (keyboards), Nesbert 'Stix' Hooper (drums) and Wayne Henderson (trombone) – originally got together as the Swingsters in 1954. Another local lad, Hubert Laws (flute), often joined them on stage as they made their way around the Texas band circuit, while either Wilton or whoever happened to be around at the time helped out on bass. During the next six years or so, the Swingsters adopted names that were designed to be more in keeping with the type of music they were then playing – the Modern Jazz Sextet (history does not record who the other two members of this line-up were), the Nite Hawks and, finally, the Jazz Crusaders. The four then decided to try their luck on the US West Coast.

Although they quickly won the respect of their peers with a series of albums for World Pacific Jazz Records, their music was considered too jazzy for mass appeal. Although collective success proved hard to come by, the four were kept busy either guesting with or acting as session musicians for a wide variety of artists. Joe Sample in particular was very much in demand at Motown, where he regularly appeared on records by the likes of Diana Ross and the Jackson Five. At the end of the Sixties, the Jazz Crusaders duly signed to that label but found little success there.

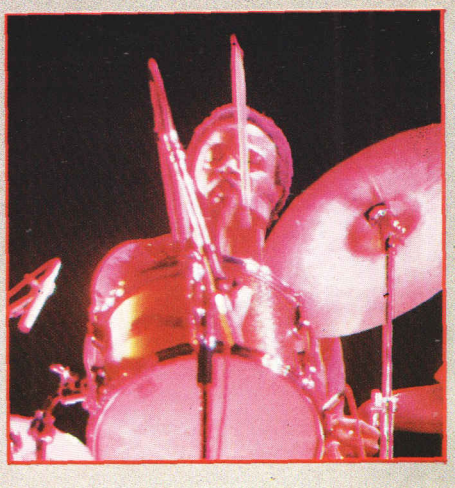
Dispensing with the 'Jazz' prefix, the Crusaders then signed to Blue Thumb Records. The band's first release for Blue Thumb, the double album *Crusaders I* (1971), quickly outsold each of the previous Jazz Crusaders LPs and carried on the group's policy of bringing in friends to help out, Chuck Rainey playing bass and Larry Carlton, Arthur Adams and David T. Walker sharing the guitar work.

1972's double LP *The Second Crusade* consolidated the group's success, which was further emphasised by *Unsung Heroes* (1973). Aside from its rather apt title, *Unsung Heroes* proved to be one of the key jazz albums of the year, and brought the Crusaders to the verge of the big-time. The band's creative momentum was maintained by a live album, *Scratch* (1974), and

*Left: The Crusaders' versatility was typified by Wilton Felder who, in addition to playing sax, was a fine bassist.*

yet another double LP, *Southern Comfort* (1974); these releases found the group gaining acceptance on the dance floor.

With Larry Carlton joining as a fifth Crusader and Wilton taking care of bass duties on record, the Crusaders had finally become a settled unit. *Chain Reaction* (1975) showed just how settled they were. By the end of the year, this LP had spent more weeks at Number 1 on the jazz charts than any other album, and had also made



*Both keyboard player Joe Sample (left) and drummer Stix Hooper (right) featured with Felder in the Jazz Crusaders' original line-up (below), which also included bespectacled trombonist Wayne Henderson.*

an impact on the soul and pop charts. Such was the album's impact that the Rolling Stones had no hesitation in inviting the Crusaders to support them on their 1975 UK tour.

The Crusaders returned to the UK in 1976, this time to tour on their own to the same critical and public acclaim that had greeted them the year before. Their visit followed the release of *Those Southern Knights*, for which the Crusaders had increased in size to become a six-piece band with the addition of Robert 'Pops' Popwell on bass. The album found the group finally using vocals, although none of the band were much more than adequate as singers.

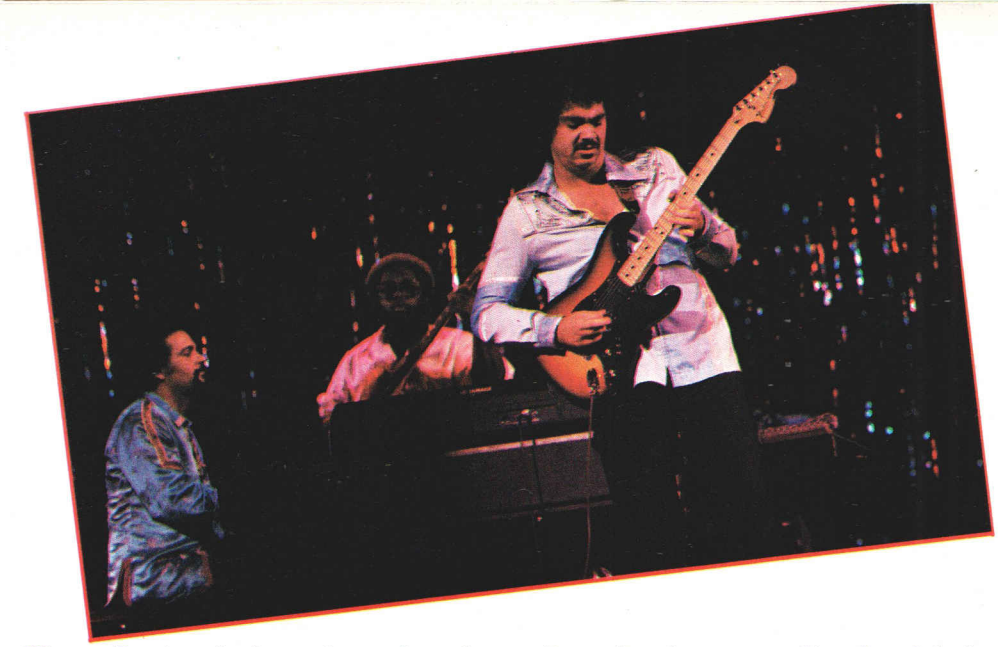
In 1976 Wayne Henderson left the Crusaders to pursue a career as a solo artist and producer. His first solo album, *Big Daddy's Place* (1977), was well received, although overshadowed by his success the previous year with Ronnie Laws, younger brother of flautist Hubert Laws. With Henderson sitting in the producer's chair, Ronnie's debut LP for Blue Note, *Pressure Sensitive*, had become the biggest-selling first LP in the label's history.

While the public waited for a new studio album from the Crusaders to see how the loss of Henderson would affect the band, Blue Thumb's new distributors ABC decided to put together a 'greatest hits' package. *The Best Of The Crusaders* drew upon material from each of the seven preceding albums and was well received.

With the release of *Free As The Wind* in 1977, it was obvious that the departure of Henderson was going to have little or no adverse effect on the band. The LP easily attained the giddy heights reached by *Chain Reaction* two years previously; the group's songwriting was as strong as ever, as was the musicianship.

Larry Carlton left the band in 1978 to pursue a career similar to Henderson's; as a producer he was responsible for a series of highly successful albums by Gap Mangione for A&M, while his own solo LP for Warners, *Larry Carlton* (1978), fared well. The three remaining original Crusaders also decided to release solo albums around the same time. Wilton Felder brought out *We All Have A Star* (1978), Joe Sample followed suit with *Rainbow Seeker* (1978), and Stix Hooper, not to be outdone, came up with his own album, *The World Within* (1979). A joint Crusaders album in 1978, *Images*, with Billy Rodgers on guitar, found the group in a more mellow mood, but this did not hinder its rise up the jazz and pop charts.

Wilton Felder's solo album had introduced a new name to Crusaders fans in lyricist Will Jennings. In 1979 he teamed up with Joe Sample to write the hit 'Street Life', which made Number 5 in the UK, Number 36 in the US. The song's singer, Randy Crawford, was a vocalist for whom



Warner Brothers had great hopes, but who had had little or no commercial success; 'Street Life' changed all that. The 1979 LP of the same name picked up awards around the world, rapidly becoming the Crusaders' most successful album.

**Rhapsody And Blues**

Randy Crawford's album, *Now We May Begin* (1980), quickly rose up the charts, while a single, 'One Day I'll Fly Away', made Number 2 in Britain. Her belated success with this Crusaders-produced effort prompted Warners to release her previous three albums in the UK.

Bill Withers joined with the Crusaders for 'Soul Shadows' from their 1980 album *Rhapsody And Blues*; although 'Soul Shadows' did not fare particularly well, it helped revive Withers' career. Not long afterwards he teamed up with another big jazz name of the Seventies, Grover Washington Jr, to hit the top spot in the US with 'Just The Two Of Us'.

Over the years, the Crusaders have become expert at breathing fresh life into the flagging careers of other artists: Joe Cocker's vocal performance on the Sample-Jennings song 'I'm So Glad I'm Standing Here Today' was nominated for a Grammy Award, and prompted him to return to recording regularly again.

Two other famous vocalists found their paths crossing the Crusaders' in the Eighties – Bobby Womack, who sang the title track of Felder's second solo LP, *Inherit The Wind*, and 'Someday We'll All Be Free', and B. B. King, who appeared with the Crusaders and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at London's Royal Festival Hall in September 1981. This occasion was comemmorated by a double album, *Royal Jam*, released in 1982.

By the early Eighties, speculation had increased about the future of the band with various reports of the three remaining founder members, Hooper, Felder and Sample, leaving the group. Given that the Crusaders had safely weathered the storms of first Henderson's and then Carlton's departure, however, it appeared probable that they would continue to delight their worldwide following for some time to come.

GRAHAM BETTS

**The Crusaders**
**Recommended Listening**

*The Best Of The Crusaders* (MCA Records MCLD 602) (Includes: Don't Let It Get You Down, Keep That Same Old Feeling, That's How I Feel, Soul Caravan, Ballad For Joe (Louis), Chain Reaction); *Street Life* (MCA Records MCF 3008) (Includes: My Lady, Rodeo Drive (High Steppin'), Street Life, Carnival Of The Night, The Hustler, Night Faces).

*Top right: The Crusaders in concert in 1979, featuring Pops Popwell (bass) and Billy Rodgers (guitar). Right: The group with singer Randy Crawford.*

# RAP IT UP

*Inset top: Grandmaster Flash hammers out 'The Message'. Above: The Sugarhill Gang, whose 'Rapper's Delight' was rap's biggest hit.*

# Street-corner jive that brought discos alive

UNLESS YOU WERE a streetwise native New Yorker, the source of the new underground black music that was appearing on disc in 1979 seemed unfathomable. Records like Fatback's 'King Tim III (Personality Jock)' and the Sugarhill Gang's 'Rapper's Delight' were a vibrant amalgam of fast-talking catchphrases and rhymes spoken over stripped-down rhythm tracks. They were called 'rap' and they seemed to spring fully-formed from some hidden tradition.

In the Fifties, the explosion of street-corner harmony groups was immortalised on record by a welter of small independent labels. Entrepreneurs and artists from this period were among the first to spot the potential of the Seventies doowop equivalent. Paul Winley (successful with the Paragons and Jesters), Bobby Robinson (whose labels had hits with Gladys Knight and the Pips, Elmore James and many others), his brother Danny Robinson (whose Holiday label had the Bop Chords) and Sylvia Robinson (singing partner of Mickey Baker on the 1957 US hit 'Love Is Strange') all knew from experience that street culture could be commercial and started signing rapping's nascent stars.

Although the presence of these music-business characters added to the sense of *déja vu* clinging to rap – young kids emerging from youth gangs to shout about fast food, comics, video games, sex, roller skating and, most of all, *themselves* – it also underlines a link back to deeper Afro-American roots. The three Robinsons and Winley were all part of the Harlem scene, one of the great centres of the black music tradition. With the exception of Sylvia Robinson, none of them had made any impact in the increasingly racially integrated disco market and rapping was the opportunity to re-invest in a music closer to rent parties, R&B, jive talking and stairwell production values.

### Words on the wireless

On radio, disc jockeys who spread the powerful urban R&B sounds over the airwaves were stars in themselves, introducing records in a high-speed rhyming slang that had developed all the way from African boasting and praise songs through black American oral traditions to the hip argot of Cotton Club bandleader Cab Calloway and the bebop singers. One of the first American DJs, Dr Hep Cat, would galvanise listeners to Austin's KVET with his sports-commentator speed and his crazy couplets: 'If you want to be hip to the tip and bop to the top/You get some mad threads that just won't stop.' Dr Hep Cat, and other DJs, such as 'Poppa Stoppa' (Clarence Hamman Jr) and Georgie Woods ('the guy with the goods'), gave back the 'live' feel to recorded music with their improvised patter.

While the boasting and insulting tradition was kept alive in American music through records like Bo Diddley's 'Say Man' and 'The Story Of Bo Diddley', it took a Jamaican producer, Coxsone Dodd, to find a new direction for DJ jive. On one of his collecting trips to the US – searching out R&B records for his sound system – Dodd became so impressed with the radio style of Jocko Henderson and Dr Jive that he encouraged his own top DJ, Count Machouki, to try out the same techniques. In the competitive world of Jamaican sound systems the idea was rapidly picked

*The Sugarhill label – formed by Sylvia Robinson (above) – was quick to spot the commercial potential of rap.*

up by rivals, eventually to appear on record in 1965 with Sir Lord Comic's 'Skaing West': 'Come on you cats, get hep, we're going west.'

Although reggae was slow to gain a following in America, a growing Jamaican presence in New York meant that, sooner or later, the Caribbean toasting style of DJ talkover would be recycled into soul. DJ Kool Herc, a resident of the Bronx who had moved from Kingston in 1967, was one of the first of a new generation to popularise the idea of rapping over records. Since the dub records in his collection failed to cut ice with local dancers, he switched to latin-tinged funk. Herc was part of a movement in the Bronx that emerged out of youth gangs, from whom house parties, dancing and writing their street name around town had always been part of their sub-culture.

Graffiti had progressed from felt-tip to spray can and now seemingly covered half of New York; dancing was a dazzling display of head spins and acrobatics called 'breaking' and parties were becoming turntable wars between rival sound systems. Kool Herc's innovations – rapping out street vernacular through an echo chamber over repeated instrumental breaks – were followed by the Grand Wizard Theodor's invention of 'scratching' (manually moving the stylus back and forth in the record groove) and DJ Grandmaster Flash's use of a drum machine (known as a beat box) in combination with montaged fragments of records. The culture had an identity and a name (hip hop) and its members (called Beat Boys) had a uniform; the sound systems wired their amps into the street lighting and created music from other people's records and their own imaginative skills.

Thus far, hip-hop style was confined to the uptown streets and clubs, but when the Fatback Band heard a tape of DJ King Tim III rapping over a Roy Ayers instrumental, they were sufficiently impressed to record with him. The effect was convincing, probably because Fatback were among the best of the street-funk groups, and the floodgates were opened. Sugarhill, the label formed by Sylvia Robinson, followed up in 1979 with 'Rapper's Delight' by the Sugarhill Gang; for the rhythm track, they stole the memorable bass riff from Chic's 'Good Times' (a huge international hit). It reached Number 36 in the US and Number 3 in the UK.

### Both sides up

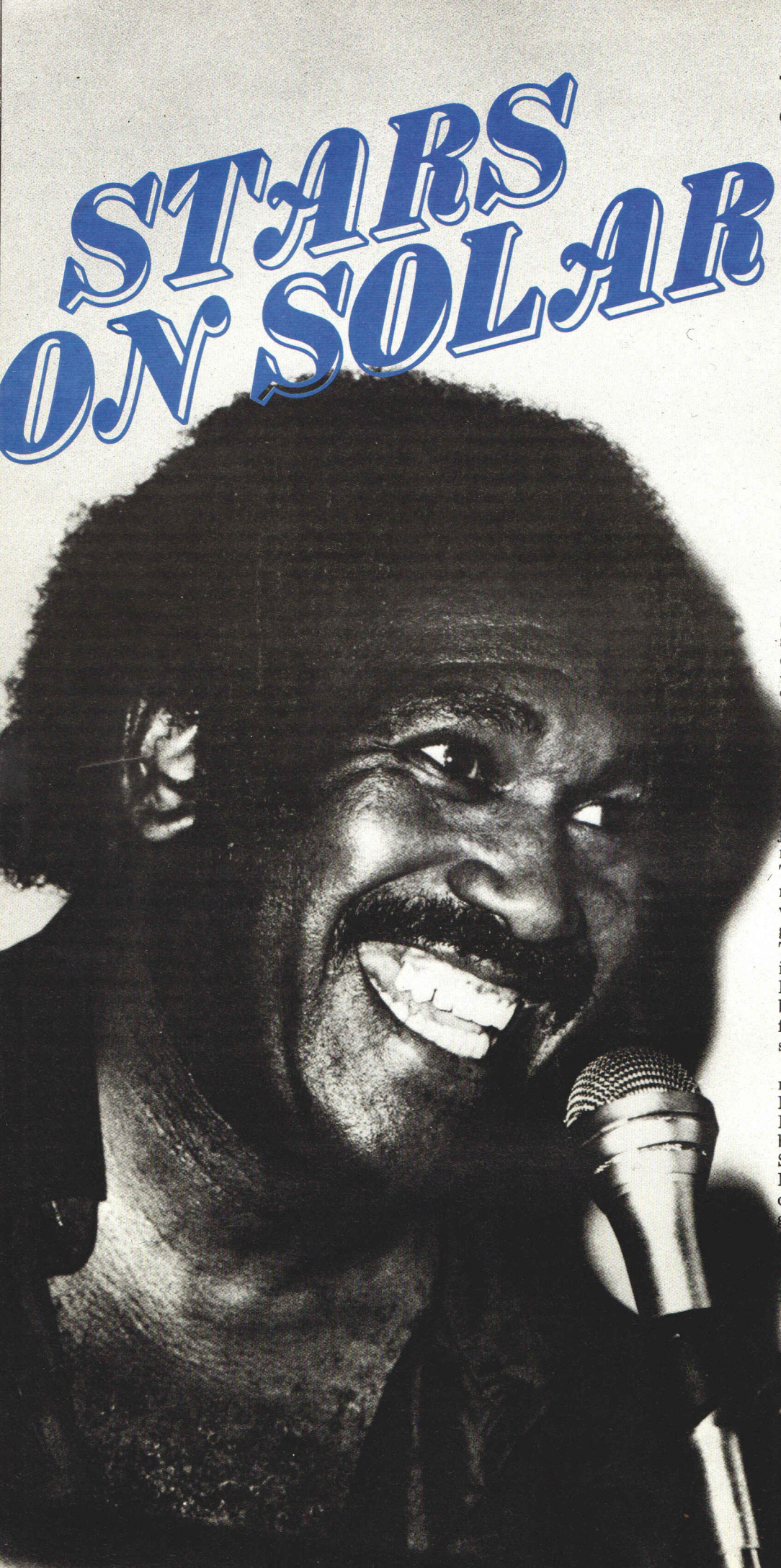
The arrival of the 12-inch single in the mid Seventies had sparked a terrific advance in disco club mixing and the practice of putting the A-side backing track on the B-side became popular. Endless variations could be rapped over popular tunes, and this led to re-recordings. Jamaican style, over distinctive rhythms – each one a new rap single.

Afrika Bambaataa accomplished one of rap's most daring coups in 1982, by converting Kraftwerk's 'Trans Europe Express' into rap. In collaboration with Streetwise/Tommy Boy producer Arthur Baker and rappers the Soul Sonic Force, Bambaataa put together a record that combined a club atmosphere with hard electronic rhythms, European melodies and a new style of rapping called DJ popping: 'Rockit don't stop it, gotta rockit don't stop/Keep tickin' and tockin', working all around the clock.' 'Planet Rock' was an immediate club and chart hit.

One of the best groups, the Furious Five who worked with Grandmaster Flash, retaliated the same year with 'The Message', an equally tough rhythm with a lyric that outlined ghetto realities in no uncertain terms: 'They pushed that girl in front of the train/Took her to the doctor, sewed her arm on again/Stabbed that man, right in his heart/Gave him a transplant for a brand new start.' Lines like these, combined with the paranoic hook – 'Don't push me 'cos I'm close to the edge' – were some way from the typical rhymes of the previous three years.

Soon after the release of 'Rapper's Delight', the music industry had begun to predict that rap would soon be finished, yet in the Eighties, its popularity showed no signs of abating. Electro-raps like the Fearless Four's 'Rockin' It', on Bobby Robinson's Enjoy label, and Warp 9's 'Light Years Away' were opening up yet another direction for countless young would-be stars to follow. DAVID TOOP

# STARS ON SOLAR



## The million-dollar sound of Los Angeles

IT WAS A SIGN of Motown's enormous influence upon popular music in its first quarter-century that virtually every ambitious entrepreneur with his own record label saw himself as the next Berry Gordy Jr, Motown's founder and leading light. Dick Griffey, head of Solar Records, had more reason than most; in less than five years, this native of Nashville made his label, with its related interests in concert promotion, artist management and music publishing, into an organisation second only to Motown itself among black-owned entertainment companies in the US.

Furthermore, Solar (Sound Of Los Angeles Records) became one of black music's most consistently interesting workshops. It launched many hits (over 50 on *Billboard*'s R&B Top Forty between 1975 and 1983) and careers (Shalamar, Lakeside, Dynasty, Midnight Star), creating a distinctive brand of black pop that was very much in tune with the Eighties.

The label's creative architect, Leon Sylvers, also applied Solar's high-gloss, singles-oriented approach to a number of outside acts, including Gladys Knight and the Pips, Evelyn King, the SOS Band, Tavares, the Brothers Johnson and the Detroit Spinners. Sylvers also influenced a new generation of young black producers, such as Kashif.

### Heading uptown

Solar was born out of Soul Train Records, a joint venture formed in 1975 by Don Cornelius, host of the popular US black-music TV show 'Soul Train', and Griffey, a former night-club owner and concert promoter who was then booking talent for the programme. Soul Train generated four Top Ten R&B hits between 1975 and 1978, including 'One For The Money' and 'Make It With You' by the Whispers, a veteran black harmony group (managed by Griffey) that had previously recorded for labels such as Janus, Soul Clock and Dore.

Another commercial success was Shalamar's 'Uptown Festival', a medley of 10 Motown oldies that crossed over to make Number 25 in the pop chart. Shalamar began as a studio project produced by Simon Soussan, a stalwart of Britain's Northern Soul scene, but Griffey subsequently formed a performing version of the group, enlisting singer Gerald Brown and two popular 'Soul Train' dancers, Jody Watley and Jeffrey Daniels.

The Soul Train label was dissolved in 1978, and Griffey took its artists – Shalamar, the Whispers and Carrie Lucas, a solo singer who became his wife – to form Solar Records. After a couple of non-descript hits, the company offered the first hint of a distinctive sound in 'Take That To The Bank' by Shalamar, a bright, snappy pop-soul tune strong on harmonies and rhythm. Produced by Leon

Sylvers and Dick Griffey, it became a Top Twenty soul hit in the US and Solar's first UK hit, making Number 20 in the charts.

The label continued to consolidate over the next 12 months, recruiting and developing new acts whose members also became part of its in-house team of songwriters and musicians. There was Lakeside, a nine-man funk combo from Ohio, who made the Top Ten in the R&B charts with 'It's All The Way Live' and *Shot Of Love* (1979); and Dynasty, who charted on both sides of the Atlantic with 'I Don't Wanna Be A Freak', a popular club hit that both parodied and capitalised on the disco style of Chic.

**The secret ingredient**

Guitarist Stephen Shockley of Lakeside and keyboard player Kevin Spencer of Dynasty became regular members of the Solar rhythm section. Other mainstays were Leon Sylvers (bass), Ernest 'Pepper' Reed (guitar) and Wardell Potts Jr (drums), while Gene Dozier took care of the musical arrangements.

Sylvers gradually became a central figure at Solar. Formerly a member, with others of his family, of the Sylvers vocal group, he began working behind the scenes at Solar in 1978. He and the rest of Solar's creative crew really hit their stride towards the end of the following year, first with Shalamar's 'The Second Time Around' (a US Number 8 pop hit), then with the Whispers' 'And The Beat Goes On'. Each sold more than one-and-a-half million copies in the US, while the Whispers' record went on to reach Number 2 in the UK.

One lesson Sylvers had learned from Motown, consciously or otherwise, was that many of the best black records have an almost tangible *tension* between the various vocal and instrumental components. Motown classics like 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine' and 'You Keep Me Hangin' On' exemplify that quality, and it was no surprise to learn that, as a youngster, Sylvers used to dissect his favourite songs 'to try to find out what made them tick'.

The Motown-Solar likeness extended to Griffey's promotional strategy for his acts. In 1980 he showcased four – Dynasty, Lakeside, Shalamar and the Whispers, with Solar-signed comedian Vaughn West as compère – in the Galaxy of Stars tour, which travelled the US and was seen by over a million people. As with the Motortown Revues of the Sixties, the performers shared backing musicians, roadies and other support services, minimising running costs and ticket prices.

Griffey's determined, no-nonsense business style was reflected by the company's

*Opposite: Dick Griffey, head of Solar. Right: The Whispers (top) and Shalamar (bottom) were two of the label's biggest acts in the Seventies and early Eighties respectively, while great things were forecast for all-girl group Klymaxx (centre).*

small roster of artists and its fine in-house creative unit. A highly influential figure within the American black music community, Griffey was more forthright on political issues than Berry Gordy had ever been, commenting to *Black Enterprise* in 1982 that 'the reason the ghetto is a ghetto is because black folks spend the dollar and that's it. The money doesn't circulate, it evaporates.' He wanted more black people to profit from 'the money our music generates'.

Solar continued to generate money in the Eighties, although crossover acceptance for a number of its most successful R&B releases proved difficult to secure in the US. Major black hits by Lakeside ('Fantastic Voyage', 'I Want To Hold Your Hand'), the Whispers ('Tonight', 'Keep On Lovin' Me') and Shalamar ('A Night To Remember') did not enjoy corresponding success in the US pop charts.

No such barriers for Shalamar, at least, seemed to exist in the UK. Their 1982 LP *Friends* – a finely-tuned, melodic extension of the original pop sound crafted by Leon Sylvers – yielded a remarkable run of four Top Twenty Hits, 'I Can Make You Feel Good' (Number 7), 'A Night To Remember' (Number 5), 'There It Is' (Number 5) and 'Friends' (Number 12). Jeffrey Daniels was so taken by the band's British success that he decided to settle in the UK; Jody Watley followed suit.

Back in the States, Griffey's company continued to promote its established acts and such Eighties newcomers as Collage, a 10-member band from San Francisco whose first LP was produced by the Whispers; Klymaxx, an eight-woman Los Angeles outfit produced by members of Lakeside; and Midnight Star, an eight-piece from Ohio, who in 1983 had their first R&B Top Ten hit with 'Freak-A-Zoid'.

Griffey also formed a pop label, Constellation, to which Stevie Wonder associate Bill Wolfer was signed, and undoubtedly he hoped that the return to popularity of Top Forty radio in the United States would allow him to match the crossover achievements of that man from Detroit, Berry Gordy Jr. Like the Motown magnate, Griffey had a clear – if somewhat cynical – approach to the music industry, summed up by his comment that 'this is the entertainment business, not the singing business.'

ADAM WHITE

*Below: Solar house producer Leon Sylvers III (third from left) poses with funk quartet parodists Dynasty.*

# THE GREAT MUSICIANS

## Neil Peart

Neil Peart is one of rock's finest show drummers, whose uncompromising personality matches his single-minded dedication to music. As one-third of Canada's Rush, Neil made a tremendous contribution to their success, replacing original drummer John Rutsey in 1974. He not only brought considerable power to the percussion department, but he also gave the band a new sense of direction.

That Peart's reputation grew relatively slowly over the years may be explained by his association with a band wrongly labelled 'heavy metal' and therefore largely ignored by critics and the rock-music establishment. Audiences were quicker to appreciate their sophistication and skill, however, and it could be said that Rush in the Eighties were closer to the Police than anything resembling heavy metal, although their music remained firmly in the rock tradition.

Although Neil Peart has proved unwilling to talk about his background or even his drumming apprenticeship, it is obvious that he is a well-trained, practised drummer who has listened hard to many styles. A thorough study of rudiments, meanwhile, gave him complete mastery of his kit. He has stated that he learned his craft by listening to big band, progressive jazz, R&B, jazz-rock, pop, reggae, session and even 'lousy' drummers. 'I am none of them but I am all of them,' he said. Giving advice to aspiring young drummers, he states: 'Don't copy one drummer, copy twenty!'

Rush's music was also influenced by diverse groups during its evolution, including Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and Yes, but the melodic and tightly conceived riffs providing the backbone of songs like 'The Spirit Of Radio' from *Permanent Waves* (1980) – arranged and executed in such a way that suggested some form of telepathy between the three players – attest to the power and originality of their later work. Much of the flexibility and variety is encouraged and enhanced by Neil's sensitive, probing drums. He manages to lay down the required heavy beat while punching out the guitar themes like a jazz big-band drummer enhancing a brass section.

He sits behind a kit that includes double bass drums, a dozen or more tom toms, a gong, tympani and other tuned percussion and a set of tubular bells. He employs a great mass of cymbals from the largest 22-inch crash and ride cymbals to tiny ten-inch diameter 'splashes'. With the aid of careful tuning, and by placing all his instruments within easy reach, he is able to construct drum solos that sound like a musical call to arms. He whirls around the kit, producing earthshaking thuds at furious speed on the bass drum while simultaneously crashing cymbals 'choked' by hand to obtain a backfiring effect.

A typical example of a Peart drum exhibition is to be found on the track 'YYZ', a concert favourite that appeared on Rush's live album *Exit . . . Stage Left*, released in 1981. After a typically sombre guitar riff from Alex Lifeson during which Neil takes the tempo at a brisk gallop, he launches into a solo that takes off on a tightly-stretched snare drum for several bars before bringing in his bass drum and choked cymbals. The effect is like that of a man being thrown over a cliff and somersaulting before hitting the rocks below.

Neil picks himself up without any apparent damage and rolls on around his small tom toms, playing a military tattoo before dropping into a double bass drum roll, continuing his melodic inventions on a set of cowbells. Accelerating slightly, he concludes the solo with a fierce barrage on the floor toms.

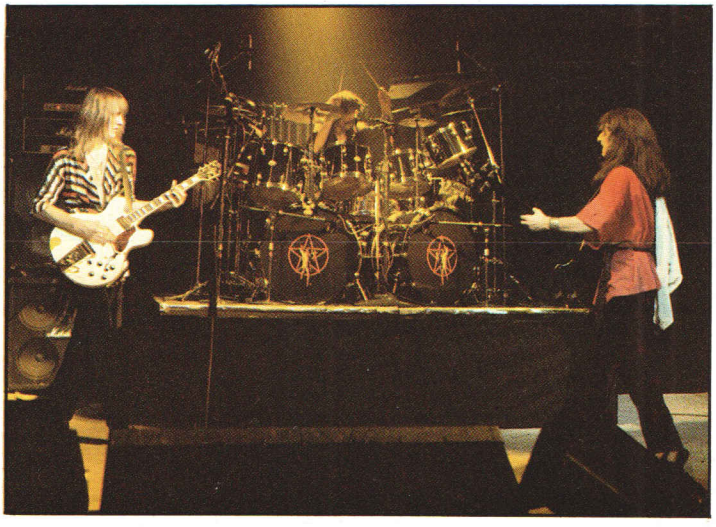
A relatively short piece of drum improvisation built around definite, pre-planned 'route markers', it never loses the piece's essential drive. Many drummers in similar circumstances play too long and get lost, or seem to lack any sense of purpose beyond getting to the end with a grand flourish. Peart's solos sustain interest throughout and have a compact feeling that exudes confidence.

There are many more examples of Peart's subtle drumming to be found on the many albums the trio released over ten years. His drumming constantly adds expression to Lifeson's guitar lines, another example being the Eastern temple-bell effects used on 'A Passage To Bangkok' from the 1976 album *2112* or the triangle sound followed by churchy tubular bells on the Genesis-influenced number 'Closer To The Heart' from the LP *A Farewell To Kings* (1977).

When confining himself to the basic snare, tom tom and bass drums, Neil's style is to pace the band like a gymnast, never flagging, offering encouragement, filling in with well-chosen licks but never seeking to impede the main runners, bassist Geddy Lee and guitarist Lifeson. He is, in short, a superb band drummer who has inspired a new, thoughtful generation of rock players.

CHRIS WELCH

*Neil Peart, master percussionist of Rush, in solo action (below and overleaf) and flanked by guitarist Alex Lifeson and bassist Geddy Lee (bottom).*



THE HISTORY OF

# Rock